As many of you know, I was a journalist for two decades before I became an Episcopal priest. I was a newspaper reporter in Southern California before coming to Sacramento where I worked for nearly ten years at The Sacramento Bee.

In my time as a reporter, I covered bank robberies, city councils, the 1984 Los Angeles Summer Olympics and one World Series, the Legislature and two presidential campaigns, which are their own special kind of mayhem.

I am often asked if I miss it.

Of course, I do. As anyone who has done this will tell you, journalism never gets out of your blood.

What I miss most is going out and talking with people from every imaginable background and in every imaginable – and unimaginable – situation.

In a way, I still do that. Journalism and the priesthood are not as far apart as you might think. Both are vocations requiring truth-seeking and truth-telling.

What struck me then, as now, is how God finds people in every walk of life and in every circumstance – in the joys and triumphs, in the tragedies and calamities.

And what I’ve experienced over and over, then as now, is how God speaks to people in their own language.

The breadth and depth of humanity is almost too huge to comprehend, and yet I have no doubt that God finds each and everyone one of us no matter where we are from, or what we’ve been through.

Today we observe Pentecost. This feast day is a celebration of this truth: God finds us in whatever circumstance we dwell.

Pentecost is the day we proclaim that God comes to us as Holy Spirit. We don’t “find” God – God finds us even in those times when we don’t notice how God’s Spirit is dwelling within us.

As a journalist, I like digging up the background on things, so I looked up the origins of Pentecost.

It starts with our Jewish forebearers.

Jesus’s disciples were, of course, Jewish, and they celebrated “Shavout,” which in Hebrew means “the festival of weeks.”
*Shavout* is a celebration of the first harvest of spring and the coming of Torah – the Law of Moses. The Book of Leviticus mandates that *Shavout* comes 50 days after the beginning of Passover.

As Christianity spread through the non-Jewish world, *shavout* was translated into Greek as “Pentecost,” meaning the “feast of 50 days,” marking the end of the Easter season.

The observance of Passover and Easter were intertwined from the start in the early church. For the first followers of Jesus, Pentecost was the new *shavout*, and Jesus was the embodiment of Torah.

Sometimes the Church portrays Pentecost as filled with noise and chaos and clanging gongs, with hordes of people speaking in tongues all at once.

But if you read carefully the story in the Acts of the Apostles, which we hear this morning, what really happens is the Holy Spirit descends on people, and there is a sweeping away of confusion.

In the story from Acts, the first thing that the disciples mention about their experience of Pentecost is that they understand each other no matter what language they speak.

The Spirit brings clarity and unity amidst their conflicts and divisions.

Before Pentecost, the disciples couldn’t understand a word each other had to say, even in the same language. Now on Pentecost they understand each other perfectly, even when speaking different languages.

Whatever nationality or ethnicity, whatever faction or clique or political party they belong to, none of it matters.

Their hearts are filled with hope, and every void inside them is filled with life.

And they know exactly what they need to do next.

They leave the safety of their hideouts and go out to proclaim by word and deed the healing grace they’ve received from God through the Holy Spirit.

From this moment on, they – and we – are born anew as one in the Spirit.

Each of us given the ability to hear the Holy Spirit, each in our own way, each in our own language that will touch us personally.

In a way, the Holy Spirit gets us off the hook from our own arrogance in thinking our way of experiencing God is the only way to experience God.

The Holy Spirit blows like the wind, into every corner of this globe, to every galaxy of this universe. No human culture, no language, no human religion can contain the Holy Spirit.
In fact, the early Christians described the Spirit with the Greek word *pneumina*, which means “wind.”

There is a challenge that comes with the Holy Spirit blowing like the wind at Pentecost – the challenge of our baptismal covenant.

In a few moments, it is appropriate that we renew our own baptismal covenant.

It only with God’s help – the grace of the Holy Spirit – that we can fulfill our promises to love our neighbors, respect the dignity of every human being, work for justice and peace, and be faithful in our prayers.

You might ask – and you should ask – how do we do this here in this cathedral?

We are in an in-between time as a congregation, awaiting the calling of a new Dean.

Calling a new dean to walk with us is important, but not the most important challenge before us.

Our most important challenge is to discern where the Holy Spirit is leading us as a congregation.

“Discernment” is perhaps an overused word in the church that is not well understood.

The late Canon Grant Carey used to say that “consensus” is what we want to do, and “discernment” is what the Holy Spirit would have us do.

Consensus is often a search for the middle ground, the path of least resistance, the best possible compromise.

Discernment holds the possibility of taking a risk, leading us on a mission that we would not have dared imagining on our own.

In my experience, discernment often requires an inner struggle, setting aside our own agenda and listening deeply for the Spirit working within us.

Discernment especially requires listening to each other – truly listening without rehearsing our next response.

Discernment is best done with each other, not alone, to avoid mistaking our ego for God.

The Holy Spirit can come like a tongues of fire, but more often, I think the Holy Spirit comes as a whisper, or a feeling that won’t let go, or in an insight offered by someone whom we might otherwise overlook.

This I also know: Discernment of the Holy Spirit takes prayer and patience, and a willingness to surrender the outcome to our faith.

Discernment requires trust that God is at work within us.

How then do we know the Holy Spirit is leading us? What do we look and listen for?
Jesus himself said start by looking for the fruits of the Spirit – healing, hope, love, charity, forgiveness.

In short, are we being led into fulfilling our baptismal promises? Or something else?

The Holy Spirit might lead us in many directions – from hospitality for everyone who walk through our doors, to caring for homelessness; to teaching children in Sunday school or being with the sick in hospitals; to working to end gun violence, or repairing this good earth, our island home.

Saint Paul assures us that when we embrace the call of the Holy Spirit through our baptism, we are truly at one with the very heart of the Risen Christ.

Paul writes this in his letter to Romans:

“All who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. It is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ.”

The promises of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost are ours today and forever, my friends.

Let’s live them. Amen.